

The Two Minute Think

Many years ago my first sales manager told me “Failing to plan is planning to fail!” While I wholeheartedly agree with this statement, I know that often we do not have the time to plan completely for every call on every prospect. This doesn’t mean that we need to “shoot from the hip” when cold calling on prospects. There is always time for a process I call the “Two Minute Think.” The “Two Minute Think” is a quick mental checklist that can significantly increase your success rate when prospecting for new business.

Fantasy 1 - Before you walk through the customer’s door you need to do a little fantasizing. Put yourself in the prospect’s shoes and ask yourself “If I owned this business, why should I advertise in (your paper name here)?” The answer may be: “We have several other similar businesses that get great results” or “Our coverage is perfect.” Whether the answer to this question is a success story from current clients, research results or obvious synergies between the prospect and your products, it will help you to focus on the primary features and benefits to discuss with the prospect.

Fantasy 2 - Next you must take on the persona of your prospect’s customers. The next question to ask is “If I was looking for this type of product/service, what would I want to know when choosing a supplier?” The answer to this query will help you think about what the customer’s message should be. This will help you to describe how you can help the customer bring customers to their business.

Begin at the beginning - You’re finally ready to come back to reality and start thinking about your call. Take a few seconds to develop a benefit laden opening statement. This IBS (Initial Benefit Statement) is intended to convince the customer that you might have something to offer them and that it is worth a few minutes of their valuable time to hear you out. You can use the answer to your “fantasy” questions to help you. “Mr. /Ms. Customer, I want to talk to you today because of the great success we’ve had finding new customers for several businesses just like yours.” Having a prepared opening statement will help you to approach the prospect with confidence and get your call off to a good start.

Engaging/Origin Question - Once you have a good opening statement, the next thing to think about is a good question to engage the customer in conversation. You should come up with a good open-ended question that will force the customer to think about his/her answer. I like using “origin” questions for this purpose. These questions are non-threatening because they ask about the historical background of the business and

yet can reveal a lot about the customer's attitudes. An example of a simple "origin" question is "What led you to get into the _____ business?" If the customer says "I take a lot of pride in my work, and nobody else does quality work" you have a starting point for your discussion and a direction for your questions. At this point you should be working toward an advertising program that communicates "Craftsmanship & Quality Work" to readers.

Object - Another thing you should consider in your "Two Minute Think" is "What objection(s) am I likely to get from this customer?" Think about what other people in the area of similar businesses have said. A successful salesperson always expects the best and is prepared for the worst. By considering potential objections you will have a thoughtful and more effective response, if they do arise.

The right tool for the job - Take a second to think about what printed material you want to share with the customer. What do you want to give to the customer or leave, if the principle is not in? Make sure you have what you need and that it is easily accessible. Rummaging desperately through your briefcase for a brochure will not inspire confidence in your organizational abilities. This is also a good time to take a quick look at yourself. Taking a second to run a comb through your hair or straighten your clothing can have a big impact on your professional appearance.

What's my motivation - The single most important thing to include in your "Two Minute Think" is "What do I want to accomplish on this call?" Do you want to collect basic information – who makes the decision, what does the business do etc. Do you want to get an appointment for a full presentation? Do you want to close a sale? Knowing what you want to accomplish will keep you focused on your goal and will greatly enhance your chance of reaching your objective. If you don't think about why you are there, you are wasting your time and even worse you are wasting the prospects time.

Two Minutes? - At this point you are probably thinking "Don't you mean Two Hour Think?" When spelled out on the printed page, this process looks quite cumbersome. Most everything takes longer to describe than do – the American Dental Assoc. instructions for brushing your teeth runs about 2 pages. Once you make doing the "Two Minute Think" a habit, you'll find two minutes is very realistic. You will find that this small investment of time will reap great returns by increasing your success ratio on cold calls. One of my favorite quotes comes from Louis Pasteur "Chance favors the prepared Mind." Take "Two Minutes" to prepare your mind and you will find chance favoring you with increased sales and a growing income.